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Laos and Cambodia

Thailand Aims for 'Asian Benelux'

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Thailand, having all but written off Vietnam in the Indochina war, is today paying close attention to Laos and Cambodia as buffers between itself and a potential Communist Chinese-controlled Vietnam satellite. The fondest hope of the Thais is to work out some sort of Benelux arrangement so that the three Buddhist kingdoms of Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos which comprise a total of about 25,000,000 people, can stand together.

Heretofore, in approaching Laos and Cambodia, Thailand has been constrained to move cautiously for fear of disturbing the French. France looks upon Laos and Cambodia as integral members of the French Union.

The Thais, who long have harbored anti-French feeling dating back to the western colonial hey-day in the last century and more recently to the Franco-Thai border war of 1940, believe that the French continually are exercising less and less control over Indochina and that they may therefore take a freer hand in trying to improve the general situation.

Rail Link Planned

In the past several months the Thais and their neighbors have undertaken a series of moves to strengthen their relationship.

Last month King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, who took refuge in Bangkok last year when he forced the reluctant French to agree to full Cambodian independence, announced that he would revisit Thailand after the Geneva conference. He has also invited Phumiphon Aduldet, the 26-year-old Massachusetts-born monarch of Thailand, to visit the Cambodian capital at Phnom Penh.

Three months ago both countries signed an agreement to operate a through train between Bangkok and Phnom Penh, thereby linking both kingdoms by rail. Significantly, Cambodia in the future will rely upon Bangkok as a principal port of entry rather than Saigon, its traditional Vietnamese outlet to the sea.

A similar agreement is expected shortly with Laos. The present Thai rail link to Udorn, in the northeast, is undergoing extension to Vienti-

ane, the Laotian capital and frontier city.

Barter trade agreements and a customs union among the three are also in the exploratory stage. And recently, too, the Thai Provincial Bank announced its intention to open a branch at Phnom Penh, the first banking connection between the two countries.

Still further, in June the Thai Cabinet disclosed it would provide educational facilities for Laotian and Cambodian theological students who wish to study at Buddhist monasteries here.

Thailand took little diplomatic or official political notice of the Indochina war, fought mainly in Vietnam, until the Vietminh rebels, under Communist direction, embarked upon several incursions into neighboring Laos last year. This generated alarm in Bangkok and caused the Thais to make their first attempt, in May of last year, to bring the Indochina affair to the attention of the United Nations.

This move, however, was blocked by the French, who, at that time, refused to consider "internationalizing" the war.

While Cambodia today, with its popular king, is comparatively free from Vietminh activity, the situation in Laos is reported to be in a state of constant deterioration. In classical guerrilla style, the Vietminh have already terrorized much of the countryside into submission while the French still cling to the last vestige of indirect rule in the main towns of the country.

Frontier With China

However, Prince Kampan, the Laotian Minister in Bangkok, is confident that when the people of Laos become convinced that Laos is truly independent, they will rally around the legitimate government of King Sisavang Vong. He said that at that time most of the so-called Free Laotians, now under Vietminh influence, would also join hands with the King.

If Thailand is interested in an independent Laos and Cambodia as buffers against Chinese encroachment, then Peking must also take interest in establishing Laos as its own buffer. Laos maintains a 150-mile frontier, in heavy mountainous territory, with Communist China. This would account for the

great Communist infiltration into Laos rather than Cambodia and also the stand adopted at Geneva by the Moscow-Peking axis.

With a nod from Chinese Foreign Minister Chou En-lai, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov, in a seemingly quid pro quo mood, claimed that the Communists held about three-fourths of Vietnam, half of Laos and a "less but developing" part of Cambodia. It would seem that the Communists are prepared to take only Annam in Vietnam while giving up the most southern Vietnamese province of Cochinchina. In return, they would expect that part of Laos which has a border relationship with Communist China.

Racial Connection

These maneuvers have not gone unnoticed in Bangkok. Indeed, Geneva has stimulated Thailand's bid for a closer relationship with Laos and Cambodia.

The Thais have a fair chance at succeeding. Religiously and racially they are akin to the Laotians and Cambodians. Indeed, the Laotian language is the Thai language and the people are indistinguishable.

Laos and Cambodia also mark the historical high-water mark of Hindu influence on the Indochina peninsula, whereas Vietnam has long been a cultural

though not political outpost of China.

More than merely a buffer between a Communist Vietnam and an independent Thailand, Laos and Cambodia may also prove to be the southeast dividing line in the area of influence between these two Asiatic giants, India and China.

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Army Plans Far East Cut

Smaller Budget Forcing Redeployment And Major Reductions in Manpower

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

Redeployment of, and major reductions in, Army strength in the Far East are planned as part of the present fiscal year's streamlining of the armed forces to accord with a reduced defense budget.

The budget approved by Congress for the fiscal year 1955, which started July 1, provides \$28,800,000,000 for all of the armed services, or about \$1,000,000,000 less than the President's original budget request and about \$5,000,000,000 less than last year's defense budget. A supplementary appropriation request for \$1,108,000,000 for military public works is still before Congress.

These appropriations for new funds and approval of new obligational authority do not, however, represent the actual military expenditures during the fiscal year. The Pentagon had "on the books" an estimated carry-over of about \$55,000,000,000, as of June 30, from appropriations in previous fiscal years, which had not been expended, even though much of it was obligated.

About \$18,600,000,000 of this carry-over represented Army appropriations, \$14,300,000,000 were Navy and \$23,800,000,000 were Air Force, with the balance for inter-service activities.

Actual military expenditures in this fiscal year may, therefore, be about \$37,800,000,000, or \$4,000,000,000 less than last year. About 22 per cent of the expenditures will be for aircraft procurement—the highest percentage since the country's military expansion started.

Army Will Cut 2 Divisions

The new budget reduces the over-all manpower strength of the defense forces from about 3,328,000 now to approximately 3,038,000 a year from now, with the Army taking the biggest cut.

Before next July the Army will be reduced from present strength of 1,407,000 to 1,164,000. Two divisions of the nineteen now on active duty will be inactivated. These two are expected to be withdrawn from the Far East, where redeployment of United

States forces already has started.

The First Cavalry Division, which has been garrisoning Hokkaido, the northernmost Japanese island, will be withdrawn in the next few months, it has been announced. No new assignment for the First has been revealed.

But three anticipated factors are expected to permit the reduction of this country's Far East ground forces—now numbering five Army divisions and one Marine division in Korea and one and a half Army divisions and one Marine division in Japan—by two or more divisions.

These factors are: Another increase in the size of the Republic of Korea forces, which now number about twenty and a half divisions, increased strength and reorganization of the Japanese armed forces and a cease-fire in Indochina.

Other details of the Army's troop strength and budgetary program follow:

Regimental combat teams remain at eighteen, the same number as at present. Anti-aircraft battalions will be increased from 117 to 122.

The strength of National Guardsmen on drill pay status will increase from 300,000 to 325,000 and the Army Reserve from 168,000 to 202,000. Guard divisions will increase from twenty-five to twenty-seven, and Guard anti-aircraft battalions from 101 to 112.

The Reserve Officers Training Corps hopes to continue the production of about 23,200 second lieutenants next year and to have a total enrollment in the senior division of 147,450 students. Officer Candidate School output, will, however, be reduced from 4,000 last year to an estimated 1,200 this year.

The Engineer Officer Candidate School at Fort Belvoir, Va., probably will be closed and the Women's Army Corps' Candidate School at Fort Lee, Va., will be curtailed to one class during the year. The Artillery Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill, Okla., and the Infantry and other branches school at Fort Benning, Ga., will remain open.

New Combat Helmet Tested

In the new budget, about 27.2 per cent of the funds asked for military research and development are earmarked for the Army—the smallest slice of the three services.

Among new items under development or test are:

A two-piece, aluminum-nylon combat helmet, which will furnish more protection than the standard steel one.

Full torso armor, armored boots, leg armor and transparent eye armor for mine-clearing crews.

A large, amphibious, self-propelled barge-like vessel, called the "Barc," which can carry 60 to 100 tons of heavy equipment out of the sea and across the beach inland.

The "Rolligon," an experimental vehicle, with big rubber and fabric bags instead of wheels or tracks, to reduce ground pressure in marshy or muddy areas.

A new Army "mule"—a lightweight weapons carrier, or streamlined jeep that weighs only 750 pounds and can carry more than its weight.